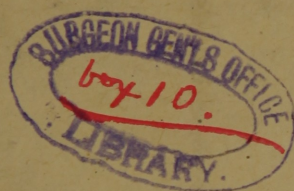


McDowell (W-A.)

Answer to a review of
McDowell's treatise on
Consumption.



Isaac Hays M.D.

Box 10

ANSWER

TO A

REVIEW OF M'DOWELL'S TREATISE ON CONSUMPTION.

LIBRARY
6/23/1844

To the Editors of the Louisville Journal:

GENTLEMEN: The subjoined answer to a review of my Treatise on Consumption, by Dr. Y., which appeared in the September number of the Medical Journal, was designed for publication in the same periodical. The magnanimous editor, Yandell, refuses to publish it.

Will you do me the favor to publish it in your paper, together with a sufficient number of extras, in pamphlet form, for each of his subscribers?

WM. A. McDOWELL.

ANSWER TO A REVIEW OF McDOWELL'S TREATISE ON CONSUMPTION,

By WM. A. McDOWELL.

—
LOUISVILLE, Sept. 12, 1844.

MESSRS. EDITORS: In a review of my Treatise on Consumption, in the September number of your Journal, I think I have reason to complain of injustice in several particulars; and consider myself entitled to room in your next number to answer and to define my position.

Injustice: 1st. In charging me with claiming "originality" in regarding consumption curable in all its stages.

I have advanced no such claim. On the contrary, I have faithfully and even greedily quoted, in support of my position of curability, all the authority I had access to, comprising every one of note who had then written upon the subject—Stokes not excepted.*

2d. In animadversions on the following paragraph of my treatise:

"My only peculiarity consists in the application of therapeutical agents, more than usually in accordance with pathological indications that have been ascertained from actual autoptical observation of the fluids, as well as the solids of the system."

"If the reader," says the reviewer, "should now come back upon us with the question, *where, then, is the peculiarity?* we should be obliged to answer, *we do not know.*"

To this I can only reply: I acknowledge no obligation to supply *understanding* to any gentleman. In the work reviewed the *facts* in the premises

* The reviewer refers to Stokes as having preceded me in curing the disease in its first stages.

are fully set forth. They have been readily comprehended and successfully practiced upon by several physicians of less lofty intellectual pretensions than my reviewer; as also by some intelligent *non-professional* gentlemen. The following is a brief summary of these facts:

The blood of the consumptive has, by various investigators as well as myself, been observed to be too poor; being especially characterised by *deficiency* of red globules, and *excess* of albumen. While in those diseases which present opposite indications, and which are generally recognized to pertain to an opposite constitution, we also find the character of the blood to be opposite. Being especially characterised by *excess* of globules, and *deficiency* of albumen. And tubercles are recognized by every pathologist, whose observations are worth quoting, to consist of *albuminous* deposits from the blood. Now, I *claim the peculiarity* of having, in accordance with this pathological condition, directed the application in treatment of consumption, of such therapeutical agents as have been ascertained to *produce* increase of the globules, and diminution of albumen in the blood, viz: the opposite character to that of the consumptive blood. The most powerful of which agents are to the extent of my experience carefully pointed out in my treatise, together with the evidences of their efficacy in producing the requisite changes. And I believe I am also *peculiar* in considering *all* such medicines and aliments as are productive of such changes, to be appropriate remedies in cases of tubercular consumption, and none others. And that all those productive of the opposite condition of the blood tend to the *production of the disease*. Among which, measures of depletion stand pre-eminent—the chief mode which has heretofore, and indeed is yet, *generally* practised in treatment of consumption.

As to the first charge against me on curability, I have, miserable that I am, been rapped over the knuckles by reviewers; first upon one hand, and then upon the other. One, for the preposterous assertion of curability of consumption, adverse to the high authorities on the subject. Another, for claiming novelty in cures, which were such very commonplace matters. In both cases the learned gentlemen seem to me to have reviewed without having been at the trouble of *reading*.

The fact that the *general* impression of the profession, as well as of the community, is adverse to curability, I believe is unquestionable. In alluding to this general scepticism, I may not, in every instance, have adverted to the exceptions; but the quotations throughout the work, and other manifestations of anxiety to sustain myself by authority against the general scepticism, it seems to me, should exonerate me from charges of inordinate desire to seem original, independently of my positive disclaimer of such pretensions in my introduction, with the single exception of the above *peculiarity*.

The general impression that consumption is incurable, is even at the present day, sustained by the highest medical authority in our country; and also the opinion that no improvement has been made in its treatment. "Known from the earliest times," says Professor Chapman, "and studied, especially of late, with unexampled diligence, and under every advantage, it still proves as intractable in the management as at the dawn of medical science. Being fully established, I doubt whether a cure was ever effected of it. Not an instance, at least have I seen, and I believe that those who report to the contrary deceive themselves, or the truth is not in them. Efforts directed by talent, and learning, and patient industry, have been rewarded by little success of any value. They have revealed its morbid anatomy, without advancing in any degree our control over it."†

The above quotation, I have reason to believe, exhibits a fair exposition of the impression of a vast majority of the medical profession. Aware of this deep-rooted scepticism, in the face of all the light that had been thrown upon the subject, up to the time of writing my treatise; and not only of the incredulity, but of the odium which had got to be attached to pretensions to cure; I thought it best to rest my evidences of curability of consumption chiefly on the exhibition of the nature of the disease, and of the *modus operandi* of the remedies used in its cure, rather than on the detail of cases cured. Because in the latter, doubts might arise as to accuracy in diagnosis. And I confidently believe that the chemical and physiological evidences there adduced, will alone suffice to satisfy any *intelligent unprejudiced* physician. 1st. That the disease, from its very nature, is necessarily curable. 2d. That the *modus operandi* of the treatment recommended, is precisely adapted to accomplish what the nature of the disease develops to be essential to the cure. 3d. That we have many and conclusive evidences of spontaneous cures. The best of all evidences of curability, and conclusive, I think, that if nature's efforts were rationally and appropriately aided, that cures might generally be expected to result. But in our profession no evidences, however clear, have heretofore proved sufficient readily to induce general acquiescence in any radical change, however advantageous. A large class, especially comprehending the indolent and the conceited—not only in our profession but I believe I may say of every calling—are commonly found arrayed in opposition to any extension of the limits of the science which is con-

nected with their pursuits. Looking upon all innovations, not originating with themselves, whether improvements or not, only as the imposition of additional labors. These violently arrayed themselves against Jenner for introducing vaccination. By these the immortal Harvey was persecuted into penury and misanthropy, in requital for the greatest advance ever achieved in physiology. It then would be folly in me to expect a more moderate outpouring of such tender mercies. My advance is neither less revolutionary nor less important to mankind than theirs, and founded in unalterable physiological truths, its ultimate prevalence is equally inevitable.

The revolutionary tendency of my treatment, is not the only revolution which the philosophical labors of the age have achieved, with regard to this much misunderstood and badly managed disorder.

1st. Until recently the causes of consumption have been so badly understood that temperate climates were esteemed chiefly incident to the disease, and physicians were in the habit of advising a tropical or Southern residence as a chief means of prevention and cure. We now have statistical, matter of fact evidence, that inhabitants of tropical climates are much more consumptive than any others of the world. Those of the temperate the least so.

2d. Until recently hereditary predisposition was considered a predominant cause of consumption; by many reckoned a prerequisite, and almost unanimously admitted to be sufficient of itself. This is now by the best evidences attainable on the subject, § found to be wholly unsupported by facts, a mere delusion of the fancy.

3d. Until recently the tuberculous deposits in the lungs were looked upon with horror, as unnatural, malignant, immovable matter. With a great number of physicians such is still the impression. We now have analyses of tubercle by several of the ablest chemists of the world, who are concurrent in representing it to be composed exclusively of principles that are found as healthy constituents in the body. Being constituted in the proportion of not less than 80 per cent. of albumen: identical with the albumen of the blood, and with about one half of the natural solids of the body. The most bland and unirritating and easiest absorbed of any of its solid constituents.

4th. Until recently consumption was considered and treated as a local disease of the lungs. It is now known to be a general disorder of the system. A constitutional disease.

5th. It was until recently considered, essentially an inflammatory disease. It is now known, from actual observation, to be wholly independent of inflammatory action, most to pertain indeed to the least inflammatory constitution.

With all these radical errors as to the causes and nature of consumption, what reason exists for wonder, that our predecessors should have been radically wrong in their treatment of it? And what better grounds of objection exists against revolutionizing their treatment, than of their theories of the nature and causes of the disease.

Errors in the treatment of our predecessors may readily be traced to their erroneous conception of the nature of the disorder. Considering it a local disease, they endeavored to eject the tubercles from the lungs by expectoration. With this view, the exhausted and ulcerated organs were irritated

† Chapman on Thoracic and Abdominal Diseases, 1844.

‡ Even changes in government, from a despotism to a republic, we generally see violently resisted, not only by those interested in the stability, but also amongst the mass who can but be benefitted by the revolution!

§ Louis on Phthisis, 2d edition.

and harassed with expectorants. Considering it essentially inflammatory, their ruinous antiphlogistic treatment followed as matter of course. To perpetuate this, the frequent occurrence of inflammatory complications, incident to tuberculous lungs, like *ignes fatui*, continued to mislead them. The marked relief afforded by depletion, on occurrence of the painful ¶ catarrhal pleuritic, pneumonic, and other inflammatory complications which were not distinguished by them, from symptoms of consumption, misled them to believe they were doing much towards the cure of the disease itself, and that its farther prosecution might accomplish it, that these complications were not distinguished from the symptoms of consumption, is manifested by examination of their chapters on symptoms. Where we find jumbled together indiscriminately the symptoms proper of consumption, and of all its manifold complications. All set forth as symptoms proper of the consumption. Making a comprehensive whole, exhibiting symptoms of nearly every disease that flesh is heir to.

But what excuse, let me ask, have physicians of the present day to offer for continuing this heretofore uniformly unsuccessful treatment, with all the light and knowledge which modern researches have thrown upon the subject, staring them in the face?

But to return to the "amiable" reviewer of my book. "We have felt most averse," says he, "to disturbing the profound repose which we imagined it was enjoying, and was likely to continue to enjoy, on the shelves of the booksellers. * * * Not only were we disposed to let his book rest, but we were even amiable enough to admit into our Journal, nearly a year ago, a communication from him in relation to it!"

"From its phraseology, readers have been led to suppose that the editors of this Journal had in their possession decisive testimony to the efficacy of Dr. McDowell's mode of treating consumption."

The readers of the Journal, I think, will not be a little surprised on turning to this publication in the January number, 1844, to find the only "testimony" there referred to (which is not published)

¶ Uncomplicated consumption is a painless disease.

is editorial, and under the identical signature of this very reviewer!!

As to the *reposing* books, I am happy to be able to tickle the benevolence of the amiable gentleman in apprising him that they have nearly all been sold—perchance altogether through the aid of that journal publication; and also, by apprising him of some good he has actually done in the world, by causing some consumptive patients to consult me, who have been cured, and who may live to bless him for it, after he shall have been forgotten by every one else.

I must moreover tender him my acknowledgments for his unexpectedly manly course in openly assailing me in a printed publication, which contrasts most favorably with the insidious chimney corner manner in which I have been assailed by some other members of the profession, leaving me without chance of reply—protesting utter ignorance of any cases I had ever cured, but retaining a fertile recollection of those I had lost, &c., to be drank in by the greedy ears of their confiding employers, and quoted and promulgated by them as of high medical authority. Such practises, whether proceeding from cupidity or from ignorance, are not merely annoying to me, but are debasing to the profession; and, in order that ignorance may no longer be degraded into an excuse for detraction, I have placed lists of the names of a respectable number of persons who have been cured of consumption under my treatment, all residents of the city of Louisville or its immediate vicinity, in the hands of Messrs. Peter & Robinson and Schorch & Yenawine, apothecaries; by reference to which, persons interested in the investigation may find out and confer with the restored individuals themselves. A large proportion of these cases were in the progress of the disease attended also by other physicians, the concurrence of whose opinions is corroborative of the consumptive character of the diseases.

WM. A. McDOWELL.

¶ The list of cases alluded to by Y. were deposited in the Medical Journal office, and remained there several months.

